



USAID
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CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

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Regional news

Nearly 200 Central Asia's Students Receive Scholarships from a USAID-supported Fund

On December 1, 2006, a recently established Central Asian Scholarship Program (CASP) awarded its first scholarships to 196 students. Recipients were selected through a competitive process from different in the region universities. One-year scholarships will cover tuition and academic literature for 43 students from Kazakhstan, 103- from Kyrgyzstan, and 50 -from Tajikistan. The CASP fund was established in May 2006 by the USAID Business and Economics Education Project to support education opportunities for capable and motivated students who seek business, economic, and other degrees in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. CASP is managed by a local NGO "Bilim - Central Asia organization" and has already raised nearly \$106,000. More than 30 Central Asia's private businesses, NGO, and state organizations have made contributions to the fund; each donation was matched by USAID.



"Without this scholarship, I would not be able to earn my degree," – says a scholarship recipient from Kazakhstan.

Photo: B&EE

Region's Educators Develop Guidelines to Expand Community Role in Education

In December a regional conference on school governance gathered over sixty representatives from Ministries of Education and Finance, local authorities, schools, and national and international organizations from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. At the conference, organized by USAID's Participation, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening Project (PEAKS), participants reviewed policy guidelines on community participation in education decision making, developed on the basis of PEAKS work in the region. The guidelines will help Central Asia's policy makers to increase community involvement in school education. Participants discussed relevant national and legal frameworks and recommended changes that would enable local communities to contribute to education reform. PEAKS works to strengthen teaching corps, increase parental and community involvement in education decision making, and improve education financing and management systems. The project began in 2003 and is scheduled to end in June 2007. It is implemented by a consortium led by the Academy for Educational Development.



Educators discussed how to involve community in educational decision making.

Photo: PEAKS

Medical Workers Establish Union of Evidence Based Medicine Specialists

The Central Asian Public Union of Evidence Based Medicine (EMB) Specialists was created at the Central Asian EBM conference that took place in Bishkek from December 11-12, 2006. The conference was attended by participants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, including representatives from ministries of health, leading medical educational institutions, research institutions, professional medical



USAID programs promote evidence based practices in the region.

Photo: ZdravPlus



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associations, as well as officials from the World Health Organization. The conference reviewed EBM promotion in the region and discussed the role of EBM in clinical practice, medical education and science, and rational drug use. According to its statute, the newly established union will facilitate communication and information sharing between participating countries and decrease duplication of efforts in developing clinical practice guidelines.

USAID-Supported Conference in Uzbekistan Discusses Islam, Civil Society, and Democracy

A conference on the role of Islam in the development of civil society in Central Asia, co-sponsored by the USAID-funded National Democratic Institute, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Institute for the Study of Civil Society, and an Uzbek NGO, took place from November 26-27, 2006 in Tashkent. The event was attended by more than 40 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the United States, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Great Britain, Israel, Russia, Pakistan, India, Kuwait, Japan, Turkey, and Germany, as well as observers from the diplomatic community, public organizations, and local university students. Participants discussed emergence of civil society and establishment of secular democracies in Central Asia, religious education in Uzbekistan, religious extremism, and links to terrorism that may present threats to regional stability. Speakers stressed the need for moderate religious education in the region and reviewed concepts of freedom and human rights as presented in the Koran.



The conference in Tashkent gathered participants from 15 countries.
Photo: NDI

Kazakhstan

Improving Relations between Courts and the Media

In November, USAID's Kazakhstan Judicial Assistance Project (KJAP), implemented by Chemonics, contributed to the improvement of court-media relations in Kazakhstan. During a roundtable on November 27, judges, journalists, and court press secretaries from across the country attended training on judicial openness, judicial-media relations, and ways to educate the media on judicial issues. On November 28, KJAP trained court press secretaries on media interviews, press releases, media advisories, and court education publications. Participants also received the "Media Relations and Public Outreach Handbook for Judges and Court Personnel," developed by the project.



USAID assists to develop judicial training and to increase transparency and accountability.
Photo: KJAP

Kyrgyzstan

Media Tour Highlights U.S. Foreign Assistance

On December 13, a group of journalists attended a media tour, organized by USAID and the U.S. Embassy to improve media and public awareness about assistance provided by the American people. Journalists visited the Health Insurance Fund, supported by the USAID ZdravPlus project, microfinance institutions Bai Tushum and Frontiers, supported through the CAMFA project, a professional development school, supported by PEAKS, and the Ak-Tilek Customs and Border Post, supported by the Embassy Export Control and Border Security Program. As a result of the tour, journalists published four articles and noted that they would like to continue learning about the American assistance.



During the media tour, journalists learned about various USAID-supported programs.
Photo: USAID



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Lawyers Advocate for Simplified Access to Defendants

In early December 2006 the Voice of Freedom National Human Rights Group invited Kyrgyzstan's lawyers and attorneys to express their support for a draft amendment to the law that would simplify the procedure for defendants to meet with their lawyers. Earlier last year, with support from Freedom House and USAID, the Voice of Freedom National Human Rights Group had conducted a study on attorney access to their defendants. The research revealed that meetings between detained defendants and their lawyers are only granted upon an official permission by an officer or a body in whose jurisdiction the criminal case is being prosecuted. Such procedure impedes the rights for criminally prosecuted individuals to receive legal representation. Human rights activists drafted a law and substantiation to initiate an amendment of the law to change the procedure. The initiative has already gained support of several parliament members and officers of the Prime Minister's Office.



The Voice of Freedom National Human Group aims to simplify lawyer access to defendants.
Photo: Freedom House

Journalists for Decriminalization of Media's Responsibility

The Voice of Freedom Public Foundation, supported by Freedom House and USAID, in December 2006 arranged a country-wide campaign, entitled "Criminal Prosecution for Speech is Inadmissible." The campaign advocated changes to the Kyrgyz Republic's Criminal Code that provide criminal liability for journalist publications. The Voice of Freedom launched their initiative with a roundtable that was attended by Parliament members, journalists, and lawyers. The campaign included public service announcements that were broadcast on ten different TV channels, a newsletter, and posters that were disseminated among the Parliament members, Government officials, and the public. The campaign was supported by the Media Representative Institute, Internews- Kyrgyzstan, as well as country's journalists.



The campaign advocated removal of criminal responsibility for journalists' articles.
Photo: Freedom House

USAID Helps Youth Acquire Marketable Skills to Help Find Jobs

In December, 2006, thirty-seven young people from Jalalabat area, south Kyrgyzstan, completed vocational courses by USAID and Mercy Corps Collaborative Development Initiative project. This master-apprentice program taught dress-making, wool processing, felt manufacturing, sewing production, interior decoration and electro-gas soldering. More than 50 apprentices from age 15-25 participate in the program, designed to help south Kyrgyzstan's youth find jobs. This year, the project will cooperate with two local implementing partners to provide apprenticeships for 350 additional students. The project will also award small grants to youth.



Thirty-seven young people completed the USAID-supported apprenticeship program.
Photo: Mercy Corps

USAID-supported Association Helps Change Microfinance Legislation

Starting in July 2006, the Association of Microfinance Institutions (AMFI), representing 11 microfinance institutions, including USAID-supported Bai Tushum, Frontiers, and FINCA, cooperated with the National Bank to revise regulations that define organizations which can serve as founders of microfinance institutions with 100% ownership. The development of microfinance companies (MFC) in Kyrgyzstan has been limited by restrictions in ownership and the maximum share size. Changed legislation will facilitate the growth of MFIs and will create a more favorable environment for international organizations to support MFC development in the country.



Members of the MFI Association discuss suggestions on the draft Tax Code.
Photo: CAMFA



Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan Introduces International Standard for Live Birth Definition

On January 1, 2007, all medical institutions in Turkmenistan began using the international live birth definition recommended by the World Health Organization. Such change was ordered by the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan last November. This very important achievement resulted from a five-year effort by international donors, including USAID, UNICEF, and UNFPA. According to the new definition, newborns weighing 500 grams and with 22 weeks of gestation (instead of the 1000 grams and 28 weeks that was required under the former system) will be registered as births. The transition to the WHO-recommended definition of live births gives those infants who previously were considered miscarriages or stillborns a chance for treatment. It is also a key step in improving newborn care and survival and will help reduce infant and child mortality.



Since January 2007 Turkmenistan applies international live birth definition.
Photo: ZdravPlus

USAID-Supported Health Training Materials to Reach More Medical Workers

The Red Crescent will distribute training materials, developed by USAID's ZdravPlus project, to 1,200 healthcare workers at DOTS pilots in Turkmenistan. Such agreement was reached last year at a meeting of a TB working group that includes representatives from the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan and such organizations as Project HOPE, USAID's ZdravPlus, and the Red Crescent. The working group discussed the strategy of health promotion and the utilization of materials already produced by international partners. Among such materials were ZdravPlus' Interpersonal Communication training materials for nurses from DOTS pilots, which from now on will be used for Red Crescent's trainings.



Red Crescent's TB trainings will use materials, developed by USAID's ZdravPlus project.
Photo: Project HOPE

USAID-supported Competition Promotes Economics Education in Turkmenistan

In November, 75 students from fourteen high schools in Ashgabat competed at the first annual Economics Brain-ring, organized by the Junior Achievement economics program, funded by USAID. The competition tested the level of erudition among teams and required extensive knowledge of economics. After intensive competition a team from the Russian-Turkmen School in Ashgabat was announced the winner. The Junior Achievement economics program is approved by the Ministry of Education as an official elective course and is the only available course on market economics available to Turkmenistan's students. More than hundred schools throughout Turkmenistan have the course as part of their core curriculum or as an extra-curricular activity, and more than 6,500 students had taken part in those courses in 2006.



Winners of the USAID-supported competition from the Russian-Turkmen School in Ashgabat.
Photo: Junior Achievement



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Uzbekistan

USAID Helps Immunize Youth against Measles, Rubella

More than 620,000 young people in Tashkent were vaccinated against measles and rubella in an immunization campaign running through December 25. The campaign was carried out by Health Ministry, UNICEF, and USAID. Young people aged 10 to 29 were vaccinated at health facilities, schools, colleges, universities and institutes, bazaars and other fixed sites in the city. More than a 1,000 medical workers were mobilized for the campaign, following training by the Health Ministry. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with a team of local epidemiologists monitored the campaign for safety. The 750,000 doses of the vaccine, together with syringes, were donated by USAID. The measles-rubella vaccine, which has been available for more than 30 years, cost around \$0.65 per dose, including safe injection equipment.



Estimated 620,000 youth in Tashkent were immunized against measles and rubella.
Photo: USAID

Imams Invited to Help Combat Human Trafficking

In October, NGO “Istiqbolli Avlod” and the International Organization for Migration working with funding from USAID on combating human trafficking, organized a meeting with Jizzak Oblast Muslim religious leaders. The meeting introduced participants to the issues of human trafficking and trafficking prevention and discussed integration of trafficking victims after their return home. One of the biggest challenges for victims is to re-adjust to life in the community. This is especially true for women who had suffered sexual exploitation. Work with religious leaders, who often serve as councilors for community members and help resolve conflicts, aims to change the society’s attitude towards trafficked women and help them recover from trauma.



USAID-supported programs work with various groups to stop trafficking in persons and reduce stigma against such persons.
Photo: USAID

Two PEAKS Teachers Receive Presidential Award in Uzbekistan

Among a 100 teachers who received awards from President Karimov on the Teacher’s Day (October 1) last year, two were former participants of a USAID education program. Larisa Nikitina from the school #145 in Tashkent and Dilorom Okjigitova from Akkurgan school #6 had participated in the USAID Participation in Education, and Knowledge Project (PEAKS). Ms. Nikitina was a trainee of the PEAKS Step by Step program for teacher development activities in 2003 and later participated as a material developer and trainer in interactive teaching and learning methods. Ms. Okjigitova received training in the reading and writing for critical thinking and community mobilization modules by the project. Even though PEAKS was implemented in Uzbekistan from 2003 through 2005, when the country’s government requested the termination of the project, these recent awards indicate the impact the project has had in the country’s education system.



Through 2005, USAID was supporting education improvements in Uzbekistan.
Photo: USAID